

PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY GROUP OF L.A.

Outline of Dr. Greenson's lecture on:

INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOANALYTIC CHILD PSYCHOLOGY

Fourth evening

Wednesday, November 13, 1946

8:15 P.M.

563 N. Alfred Street

THE PHALLIC PHASE. Between the ages of 3 and 4 to 6 and 7. The most striking characteristic: pleasure centered around the penis. Parallel in girls: center of pleasure clitoris. Genitals now the organs of greatest pleasurable tension and the greatest discharge. Different reaction of boys and girls towards penis. Boy -- pleasure and pride; girl -- boys have something that girls do not have. Sexes are determined by the possession of the penis or the lack of a penis. Feeling in girls: I want to have that too: I want to be a boy; not to be reversed for boys: they do not want to be girls, because girls have something less than boys have. Idea of more substance results in the idea it must be better. This attitude exists long before the cultural evaluation that males are more valuable than females is explained. The girl feels "since I have something less, there must be something wrong with me". When the boy discovers penis, he has found the sexual organ that will retain its importance through life. When girl discovers the clitoris she has not yet discovered the sexual organ (vagina) that will in her adult life be the executive of sexual excitement and pleasure. Over-all importance of this phase is the preoccupation with the male sexual organ on the part of boys and girls. Before the phallic stage already playing with genitals existent, but the intensity as in the phallic stage is not existent yet.

Parents' reaction to the manifestation of infantile sexuality at this stage: The frustration is as harmful as it was in the earlier phases. If child is not frightened or does not feel guilty there is no excess masturbation, but if discharge interfered with by parents, tension arises that looks for other outlets and may result in pathologically frequent masturbation. Repetition becomes necessary for inability of undisturbed discharge. Masturbation prohibitions create feeling in the child that what it does is wrong, equals bad, equals dirty. The statement that masturbation is harmful is a myth. There is neither physical nor psychological harm done through uninterfered masturbation. The problems arise from the child's anxiety and guilt feelings. Prohibitions create a great conflict: highly pleasurable organ; desire for pleasurable discharge on the part of the child -- parents' judgment stating that just this pleasure is bad and harmful. The result is equivalent to the interference with instinctual satisfactions of former periods. Masturbation may represent possibilities to express by it, to be used as comfort and no more as a purely instinctual satisfaction (Guilt feelings arising through Oedipus fantasies in connection with masturbation will be discussed later).

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Very characteristic at that time: showing up of intense curiosity pertaining to sexual pleasures. How to handle both of these problems: The rules are the same as before. The result will be highly determined by the parents' own attitude toward the matter of sexuality. Do not ~~take~~ undue notice of the child's sexual manifestations, unless it presents problems. For instance, if the child masturbates in public, it has to be told that matters of sexuality are a private affair. Concerning curiosity, it will depend largely upon how free the parents feel to tell their children. In general, questions should be answered absolutely truthfully but if parents should be emotionally disturbed by questions about sexuality, it may be better for another person to give the child the desired information. How much to tell depends upon how much the child is able and ready to accept and understand. Refusal is one extreme, giving more information than the child requests is the other. Too much information at a given time may be an overstimulation, may create fear, and bring the child to refuse to show a natural amount of inquisitiveness. If information is given to the right extent, it will show in the child's reaction. All information should be given gradually and step by step. Avoidance of answering creates a feeling in the child that something must be wrong. Lying creates great varieties of problems in the child.

Fears of the phallic phase: according to the intense libidinal cathexis, great preoccupation with newly detected precious organ. Therefore, it has to be safeguarded. Retaliation fear creates expectation that the organ which has sinned will be punished. Apparent confirmation of these fantasies expressed in the tremendous varieties of castration jokes, of real castration threats, of the devices used to keep the child from masturbation. Dynamic weight of all these unreal threats drawn from the real fact that there are human beings without penises, which is taken as evidence that something may happen to the highly valuable organ (castration fear). Reaction of girl toward the penis: since I have something less and since at that time the child cannot conceive yet that there are differences from the beginning, it necessarily has to assume that it has had a penis once and must have lost it. Consequently it concludes that it must have been bad and punished with the loss of the penis -- justly or unjustly. Evidence that somebody with a penis is more valuable seems to be borne out by the fact that the mother prefers the boy and, though father may prefer the girl, he is not yet of the same importance for her as the mother. Urination and the skill of male urination is another motive for feeling slighted on the part of the girl. This attitude of the girl called penis envy. Upon the anatomical difference which is the basis, our culture has built up this reaction towards male and female.

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